What is Self-Regulated Learning?

Self-regulated learning (SRL) involves being metacognitively, motivationally, and strategically engaged in learning (Zimmerman, 1990 in Perry, Hutchinson & Thaubberger, 2007). In simpler terms, students who are strong self-regulators are able to:

• Set effective goals,
• Strategically achieve those goals and
• Monitor their progress (Risemberg & Zimmerman, 1992)

As well, they see the importance of interpreting tasks given to them by teachers (Butler & Schnellert, 2013).

Why is Self-Regulated Learning Important?

Self-regulated learning actively involves students in the learning process and places them in a position to have greater control over their own learning (Kramarski, Desoete, Bannert, Narciss & Perry, 2013). Learners who are strong self-regulators are likely to achieve at higher levels (Risemberg & Zimmerman, 1992; Kramarski, Desoete, Bannert, Narciss, & Perry, 2013). Additionally, self-regulation is not just important for school. It is a lifelong skill that generally translates into greater personal success long after school (Butler & Schnellert, 2013). Self-regulated learning moves in a cycle (see Figure 1), so once the skills are taught and internalized, a student continues to enhance their self-regulation automatically.

Key Terms Stated Simply:


Metacognition: Knowing about your knowing.

Self-efficacy: One’s belief in their ability to achieve a goal.
Goal Setting

Goal setting is an important cornerstone of SRL. A skilled self-regulated learner enters a learning activity with a goal in mind and use specific strategies to achieve that goal, they reflect upon their progress as they go and they are able to change strategies if needed (Schunk, 1990). For example, a highly self-regulated learner working on a math would maybe set out with the goal of solving a math word problem and decide to use algebra as a strategy. If the students then runs into challenges as they go, they might want to reassess the strategies they are using and try using manipulatives or diagrams to support their learning. When the student is successful they build self-efficacy, which in turn promotes further goal setting and self-regulated learning strategy use (see Figure 2). Of additional importance is the finding that self-set goals have the potential to lead to greater self-efficacy and performance (Schunk, 1990), when students are involved in the process of goal setting, stronger results are seen.

Who are our Underachievers?

Gifted learners are often faced with the expectation that since they are gifted they should not be struggling in school. However, gifted students are susceptible to the same learning challenges as anyone else, in addition to challenges uniquely common to the gifted population of learners such as perfectionism. First and foremost, it is important for educators to consider each learner as an individual rather than an assumed set of traits. Gifted learners may have dual exceptionalities (learning disability, ADHD, ASD, etc.), and challenges with motivation and socio-emotional adjustment (Wellisch & Brown, 2012) just as any other student may. Interestingly, in a study by McCoach and Siegle (2003) it was found that the greatest areas of difference between gifted achievers and underachievers were found in the areas of goal valuation and motivation and self-regulation, suggesting further development of these areas would be of benefit.

Self-Regulated Learning for All Learners

Self-regulated learning is not just for gifted students. It allows for all students to learn at their ability level and pace (Stoeger & Ziegler, 2010). A typical classroom will have a wide range of learners including, but not limited to, students with learning exceptionalities or behavioural challenges. SRL-supportive environments have been shown to support all learners in working strategically to support their own learning (Butler & Schnellert, 2013). SRL has been shown to have a positive effect on motivation and achievement in students with diverse abilities in ‘typical’ classrooms (Stoeger & Ziegler, 2010).
The Role of the Teacher

While students may be the central focus of self-regulated learning, the role of the teacher is crucial to fostering the self-regulated skill development many students are lacking. It has been shown that gifted students can be taught to better regulate their learning (Risemberg & Zimmerman, 1992) and that SRL is particularly effective when teachers themselves are engaged in developing their own SRL (Perry, Hutchinson, Thauberger, 2007). A focus group discussion led by Siegle, Rubenstein & Mitchell (2014) found that university honors freshmen “most often attributed their interest and motivation in high school to their interactions with their teachers” which speaks volumes to the positive effect a teacher can have on their students. With new practices and theories being continually developed it can be challenging for teachers to feel self-efficacious themselves, luckily, self-regulated learning is based upon ‘common sense practices’ that many teachers are already using in their classes. Teachers can help promote SRL in their classes by continuing to encourage autonomy, differentiating assignments, fostering students metacognitive development and creating a supportive classroom environment based on different individual strengths (Butler & Schnellert, 2013). Also, simple additions to classroom routines such as allowing students choice, flexibility and control of their learning (Willard-Holt, Weber, Morrison & Horgan, 2013) through self-regulated strategies such as goal setting and reflection can lead to greater self-efficacy and in turn, increased self-regulated learning.

Things to Try…

- Goal setting
- Student Reflection journals, what worked? What didn’t?
- Incorporate Choice into assignments. How something is presented, what topic, etc.
- Focus on Student Strengths to build self-efficacy
- Create ‘strategy lists’ for students to refer to in different subject areas

Improving Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is one’s belief in their ability to achieve a goal or accomplish a task. As seen in Figure 2, Self-efficacy is an integral part of the SRL cycle but unfortunately many students struggling in school have low self-efficacy (Butler & Schnellert, 2013). Students who have low self-efficacy for learning may avoid tasks whereas those with high self-efficacy are more likely to participate” (Schunk, 1990). Additionally, one’s self-efficacy is linked to achievement motivation and these self-beliefs are shaped by an individual learners interaction with their learning environment (Yun Dai, Moon, & Feldhusen, 1998). Since self-efficacy is part of the SRL cycle it is hard to know which comes first. By providing a positive and supportive, strength based learning environment teachers can set the foundation for strong self-efficacy in a classroom, which will work to further support SRL. As students succeed at what they do they will further develop their self-efficacy.
References


